

XXXII.—*A few Remarks on the European Certhiidae.*

By COLLINGWOOD INGRAM, F.Z.S., M.B.O.U.

(Text-fig. 2.)

THANKS to the generosity of the Hon. Walter Rothschild (who very kindly lent me a number of skins from the Tring Museum to supplement my own specimens), I have recently been able to compare an exceptionally interesting series of Tree-Creepers with those in the British Museum. With this mass of material at my disposal, the separation of the various subspecies becomes a comparatively easy matter.

Most ornithologists now divide the Tree-Creepers of the western Palearctic Region into two groups, taking *Certhia familiaris* L. as the type of one and *Certhia brachydactyla* Brehm for the other. Although the various forms of these birds generally inhabit tolerably well-marked areas, their ranges often coalesce and they are not infrequently found together. This seems to me to be really the only argument in favour of giving the two birds specific rank, for their habits and mode of nidification are practically identical, while their superficial differences appear to be absurdly inadequate. Among the European Tree-Creepers only the following so-called specific characters appear to be at all constant:—

<i>C. familiaris.</i>	<i>C. brachydactyla.</i>
Long hind claw. (Average length 9 mm.)	Short, arched hind claw. (Average length 7·5 mm.)
Under wing-coverts pure white.	Under wing-coverts usually marked with dusky.
Under surface, as a rule, pure white; almost invariably whiter than in <i>C. brachydactyla</i> .	Under surface usually dirty white; often washed with tawny buff near the belly.

(*Note.*—The short bill is a character only applicable to the northern races, *C. f. familiaris*, *C. f. macrodactyla*, and *C. f. britannica*. In these, however, it is very well marked.)

It has been stated that the Short-clawed Tree-Creeper\* never, or hardly ever, ranges above 1000 metres, but this is not a fact. I have several times shot *C. brachydactyla* at a greater height, and possess two examples taken in the Maritime Alps at 1700 metres : while representatives of both this and *C. familiaris* were obtained by Mr. Rothschild's collector near Caunterets in the Pyrenees at an elevation of about 1400 metres. As a breeding species, however, the southern race of *C. brachydactyla* is found alone on the plains below, just as *C. familiaris* reigns supreme in the still more elevated pine-forests.

The Long-clawed Tree-Creepers of the Continent are said to have a predilection for coniferous trees, while the various forms of *C. brachydactyla* are supposed to prefer other kinds of timber. In my experience this certainly seems to be true, but in connection with this alleged preference we must not forget that conifers usually predominate at the high elevations frequented by the former species, in which case, of course, they would have no choice but to affect these trees. The English *C. familiaris britannica*, at any rate, displays no such partiality for conifers. Dr. Hartert has also pointed out that *C. familiaris* is not invariably found in pine-forests, but may be sought for in mixed woods and especially among beeches.

Bailly declares that the Alpine bird is more wary than the lowland species, and that its call-note is softer in tone—"son cri de rappel est constamment moins aigu et plus doux" (Orn. de la Savoie, ii. p. 491). I have met with both species in the same wood in the Maritime Alps, and I frankly admit I did not then detect any difference in their voice or habits; but, as I did not, at that time, appreciate that the two birds were distinct, I might have easily over-

\* On account of Brehm's specific name, *brachydactyla*, this bird has often been unhappily termed the Short-toed Tree-Creeper. Of course I cannot change its recognised scientific appellation, but I do not propose to further perpetuate an obvious error by translating it into my own language, for it is well known that it is the *claw* and *not* the hind toe, or hallux, that is slightly shorter in this bird.

looked the subtle difference. Dr. Hartert, at any rate, assures me that their notes are easily recognisable.

With regard to the several forms of *C. brachydactyla*, I have nothing to add to Dr. Hartert's admirable account of these birds ('Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna,' i. 1905, pp. 323-326), beyond that my own collection shows that *C. b. ultramontana* Hart. is found (as might be expected) right across southern France from Italy to Spain, its northern range in the first-named country being apparently limited by the *Massif Central*.

But on turning to the *C. familiaris* group, I find that there are several points that still require some elucidation. For instance, a large series makes it obvious that the bird inhabiting the southern Alpine districts is not the same as that found in the Vosges Mountains and Germany. The former is not only a slightly larger bird, but differs materially in the tone of its plumage and the dimensions of its bill.

Text-fig. 2.



- A. Bill of typical *Certhia familiaris* and *C. f. macrodactyla*.  
 B. Bill of typical *C. f. costae* and *C. f. pyrenaica*.

In fact, the bill (averaging 16.25 mm.) is normally quite as long and as slender as in the typical *C. brachydactyla*, while, on the other hand, this member appears to be almost invariably short and comparatively stout in the Vosges and German specimens (average length of bill in nine examples 13.5 mm., maximum about 15 mm.), in which respect they approach the typical and English forms. In coloration the differences in the "warm" and "cold" shades of the dorsal plumage is analogous to that found in *C. b. brachydactyla* and *C. b. ultramontana*. The southern bird, lacking to a

great extent the tawny-buff tints on the back and wings, and being heavily but indistinctly marked with white, offers a very grey—almost hoary—appearance when placed beside a Vosges specimen. The question is, can this Alpine bird be Bailly's *Certhia costæ* (cf. Bull. Soc. d'Hist. Nat. de la Savoie, 1852, p. 11)? Unfortunately, I have not been able to examine critically any specimens from the type locality, but there is every reason to suppose that the Savoyan bird is identical with that of the southern Alps. An example from Switzerland and a second from Vorarlberg in the Tring Museum, even if not quite so grey in coloration, agree well in other respects with my own specimens from the Maritime Alps, while there is a bird in the Bureau collection, from Tournoux in the Basses-Alpes, precisely similar to my own; and we have Bailly's authority for saying that his *C. costæ* is found in this department.

Certainly that writer's description of the plumage of his Savoyan Tree-Creeper (Orn. de la Savoie, 1853, ii. p. 487) does not altogether tally with my pale-backed birds from south-east France; but then one must allow for a certain amount of error in the older accounts of the Certhiidæ, for these birds were formerly very imperfectly known; and, moreover, it is highly probable that Bailly had only *C. brachydactyla* or *C. b. ultramontana* with which to compare his new species. Referring to the bill, he remarks that this is very variable, sometimes measuring from 14 to 15 mm. and sometimes from 16 to 17 mm. On the whole, therefore, I am bound to associate my Maritime Alps birds with those of Savoy and the rest of the Alpine system. This being so, it is incumbent upon me to reinstate Bailly's name, *Certhia familiaris costæ*, for this mountain race\*.

In the upper forests of the Pyrenees a similar long-billed form of *C. familiaris* is found, differing only from *C. f. costæ*

\* The only Corsican example in the British Museum appeared to be indistinguishable from the Vorarlberg specimen in the Rothschild collection. It is possible, therefore, that Dr. Hartert's *C. f. corsa* (Vög. pal. F. i. p. 320) may prove to be inseparable from *C. f. costæ*.

in the browner and warmer tones of its plumage. For this apparently undescribed form I propose the name

*CERTHIA FAMILIARIS PYRENAICA*, subsp. nov.

Similar to *C. f. costæ*, but generally much browner above. As with *C. f. britannica*, this effect is partly produced by the whitish centres to the feathers on the back being broadly edged or washed with tawny. Rump bright tawny. Underparts pure white. Wing about 65 or 66 mm.

Types in the Tring Museum, ♂ ♀. Reine Hortense, nr. Caunterets (altitude 1400 metres), 30.xii.06 and 6.ii.07. (*Note.*—When he published the account of the Certhiidae in his 'Vögel der paläarktischen Fauna,' Dr. Hartert had not seen these Pyrenean specimens.)

According to my investigations we now have the following forms of *C. familiaris* inhabiting comparatively well-defined areas in western Europe:—

A. Short-billed birds.

i. *Certhia familiaris familiaris*.

*Certhia familiaris* Linnæus, Syst. Nat. 1758, p. 118: Sweden.

Rumania, E. Germany (Hartert), Scandinavia and N. Russia, across northern Asia.

ii. *Certhia familiaris macrodactyla*.

*Certhia macrodactyla* Brehm, Handb. Nat. Deutsch. 1831, p. 208: Germany.

The forests of western Germany, Belgium, and N.E. France (Vosges Mountains).

iii. *Certhia familiaris britannica*.

*Certhia britannica* Ridgway, Proc. U.S. Nat. Mus. v. 1882, p. 113: England.

The British Isles. (*Note.*—Irish specimens are inclined to be very tawny in coloration, and often have the belly and flanks washed with buff.)

## B. Long-billed birds.

i. *Certhia familiaris costæ*.

*Certhia costæ* Bailly, Observations sur les mœurs et les habitudes des oiseaux de la Savoie, 1847\*: Chambéry, Savoy.

Essentially a mountain species, inhabiting the Alpine system at elevations from about 1000 metres upwards.

ii. *Certhia familiaris pyrenaica*.

*Certhia familiaris pyrenaica* Ingram, *supra*: Cauterets, Pyrenees.

The upper forests of the Pyrenees.

iii. *Certhia familiaris corsa*.

*Certhia familiaris corsa* Hartert, Vög. pal. F. i. 1905, p. 320: Corsica.

The mountains of Corsica.

XXXIII.—*On a Collection of Birds from Southern Abyssinia, presented to the British Museum by Mr. W. N. McMillan.*—  
Part I. PASSERES. By W. R. OGILVIE-GRANT.

(Plate XII.)

In the October number of the 'Ibis,' 1907, I published a report on a valuable collection of birds made by Mr. W. N. McMillan during an expedition to the Sobat and Baro Rivers in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, between November 1903 and March 1904. Mr. P. C. Zaphiro, a good field-naturalist and skilful taxidermist, was employed by Mr. McMillan, who in the most generous way placed the whole of his collection of birds at the disposal of the Natural History Museum.

Finding that this collection was most acceptable to the Museum, Mr. McMillan very wisely decided to employ the same collector to investigate the fauna of Southern Abyssinia, between Addis Abbaba and Lake Rudolf, where comparatively little collecting had been done.

\* I have been unable to see this rare pamphlet which is quoted by Bailly in his article in Bull. Soc. Hist. Nat. Savoie, 1852, p. 11.